

Can Your  
Child be  
Drinking

## A Deadly Mix?

### A LOOK AT ALCOHOL + ENERGY DRINKS

What happens when you mix the depressant in alcohol and the stimulant in energy drinks? You get **"wide-awake drunk"**. Where once energy drinks was a fad among our youth, it has now become a staple in their life. Energy drinks became a \$4.8 billion industry in the US last year. Most energy drinks contain large doses of caffeine, ephedrine, guarana, taurine and ginseng and now, alcohol.

The newest trend of energy drinks is referred to as "speedball in a can". **Alcoholic Energy Drinks** (AED's) are prepackaged beverages that contain alcohol, caffeine and other stimulants. Turns out, teens and even pre-teens are being allowed to purchase energy drinks containing alcohol. Why? See if you can tell the difference in these cans:



Rock Star 21 has 6% alcohol. Sparks contains 7% alcohol. There are **8 products that contain 200% more of the alcohol found in a typical can of beer.** (www.kvu.com) Alabama has no law regarding placement of alcoholic drinks separate from nonalcoholic

these AED's are often stocked with their nonalcoholic cousins. Without scanners that alert a store clerk to a product containing alcohol, it is left up to her to know the difference between each product her store sales. Because these cans have similar graphics, store clerks as well as consumers are mistaking them for regular energy drinks.

What happens when an unassuming person walks into a store, picks up an AED, which is stocked next to fruit juice, gets in his car and drives? It might mean that he experiences two crashes-the inevitable crash that comes after the initial rush from an energy drink and the one that involves his car. Now, what if this is your child?

Thirty-one percent of 12-17 year olds and 34% of 18-24 year olds report regular consumption of energy drinks. Producers are focusing not on television and radio but on sporting events, text messaging and internet forums such as Facebook and MySpace to channel their products. **Alcohol producers, who spend \$4.5 billion marketing their products, have built on the popularity of these drinks by blurring the line between alcoholic and nonalcoholic beverages.** One company's goal: "create brand confusion with nonalcoholic versions and provide a cheap alternative to buying both the energy drink and alcohol separately." The

drinks cost up to a dollar less than their counterparts without alcohol. A marketing strategist from "Agwa", a drink that was billed as the first alcoholic energy drink, was quoted: "We cannot bottle cocaine. But certainly people who have tried it have enjoyed amazing effects with it." Another producer states: "Young people want to get a buzz and stay up all night. We make no pretense that this is a health drink. This is the party market." InFUUZ™ (pictured above), states on its website that it is "The Ultimate Party Drink" and boasts "12.5% Alcohol Energy Drink" while young nurses hold up IV bags of the product.

Three cans (the average amount consumed in one day) of one of the beverages equal five shots of whiskey and contain the caffeine of 15 sodas.

**Are teens purchasing these "alcopops" by mistake or on purpose?** For those that are already mixing energy drinks with alcohol at local parties, this is a "cheap-quick-fix". For the person simply seeking energy, it's a mistake, placing them in a situation they didn't intend to be. For both, it could be deadly.

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**The question, then, is why are teens and college students mixing?** A web-based survey of more than 4,000 students revealed that of the students who drank in the last 30 days, 24% mixed energy drinks with alcohol in order to “drink more and drink longer”. A separate survey showed that 54% of those drinking an energy drink do so to improve the taste of alcohol. Yet, a drinker of a popular brand of AED has this to say about it: “...People aren’t knocking back for the flavor. It tastes like carbonated cough syrup, sickly sweet, with a wince-inducing, orange-lemon flavor that takes a few sips to stomach”.



We all know that alcohol and youth do not mix. It's illegal for many reasons, one of them being that alcohol is the leading cause of death among youth. Also, research has shown that alcohol consumption, even in modest amounts, can result in permanent brain damage because the brain continues to develop into a person's mid-twenties. In addition, about 70,000 teens are sexually assaulted and more than 600,000 are physically assaulted each year as a result of drinking or being with someone who is; 400,000 students a year have unprotected sex as a result of alcohol consumption, which puts them at high risk for pregnancy, STDs and HIV/AIDS.

**Does adding alcohol to energy drinks create more risks than alcohol alone?** Marin Institute performed an in-depth study on the effects of mixing energy drinks with alcohol. Public Health and Safety Officials have become alarmed by their findings. Researchers found in this study that “The subjects’ performance was significantly worse after ingesting the AED despite their perception of increased alertness and reduced intoxication.”

One researcher describes it as getting into a car and stepping on the gas pedal and the brake at the same time.

The caffeine, a stimulant, disguises the intoxicating effects of alcohol. Fatigue is the body's way of saying it's had enough to drink. High doses of caffeine mask your body's natural way of alerting you to stop. In other words you get, “wide-awake drunk”. But a drunk person is still a drunk person. ([marininstitute.org/alcopops/energy\\_drink\\_report.com](http://marininstitute.org/alcopops/energy_drink_report.com))

As this suggests, alcohol and energy drinks create a dangerous mix. Two industry giants have already responded to the criticism. Anheuser-Busch and Miller-Coors agreed to remove their products off the market, amounting to an admission that alcoholic energy drinks fuel underage drinking. Yet, the alcoholic industry as a whole fails to alert users to the potential for misjudging one's intoxication and, instead, suggests that the beverages will enhance alertness and energy. They are simply viewed by producers as having great potential for increasing sales and profits. It is predicted that companies will gross \$10 billion yearly by 2010. We need to ask the question: **do the earnings of these companies pay the price for lives that are lost due to their lack of educating consumers to the side-effects of their product?**

### What can you do?

Know what your kids are doing. If they're drinking, get them to stop now.

Share this article with your children.

Read the labels on energy drinks carefully.

The Responsible Vendor Dept of the Alabama Alcoholic Beverage Control Board said that consumers have the most influence on this issue and suggests you ask store managers to stock these items separately and to educate their clerks.

## PARENTALK is a publication of The Alabama Department of Children's Affairs and The Alabama Parent Network

The Parent Network serves as a state partner on parent leadership initiatives and parent education. The goal is to support the varied needs of parents while enhancing their ability to support their children and to connect parents with available resources.



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